

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L PARIS 27228

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, FR, NI

SUBJECT: ARIKPO VISIT TO FRANCE

REF: LAGOS 10535

1. QUAI DEPUTY DIRECTOR FOR AFRICA COMBAL TOLD US NOVEMBER 14 THAT EXTERNAL AFFAIRS COMMISSIONER ARIKPO'S VISIT HAD BEEN "GOOD" AND THAT ARIKPO IMPRESSED THE FRENCH AS BEING CAPABLE, SERIOUS, RESERVED AND SUBTLE. DESCRIBING THE BACKGROUND OF THE VISIT, COMBAL SAID THAT THE POLITICAL SHADOWS OF FRENCH POLICY TOWARDS BIAFRA WERE DISSIPATED SOME TIME AGO. HOWEVER, SHARPLY DIVERGENT FRENCH AND NIGERIAN POSITIONS DURING THE EARLY STAGES OF EC-ACP NEGOTIATIONS AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, FRENCH SUSPICIONS OF A SUSPECTED "MENACE" FROM LARGE, RICH, AMBITIOUS NIGERIA TO ITS SMALL FRANCOPHONE NEIGHBORS AND NIGERIA'S SIMPLISTIC ASSUMPTION THAT DAHOMEY DAHONEY, NIGER, ET AL, WERE MERE FRENCH PUPPETS CAST A CLOUD OVER FRANCO-NIGERIAN RELATIONS UNTIL VERY RECENTLY. THE FRENCH NOW THINK THAT NIGERIA IS PRIMARILY CONCERNED WITH INTERNAL DEVELOPMENTS, WANTS GOOD RELATIONS WITH ITS NEIGHBORS, AND IS NOT A "THREAT"; ARIKPO'S DISCUSSIONS WITH GISCARD AND SAUVAGNARGUES CONFIRMED THIS

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VIEW, COMBAL SAID.

2. THERE WERE FEW SPECIFIC ACCOMPLISHMENTS, ACCORDING TO COMBAL. IN RESPONSE TO THE NIGERIAN REQUEST FOR A TRANSFER OF FRENCH TECHNOLOGY, THE FRENCH PROPOSED THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A JOINT INDUSTRIAL COMMISSION TO PLAN AND COORDINATE TECHNOLOGICAL QUESTIONS AND TRAINING. IT BECAME CLEAR, COMBAL INDICATED, THAT ARIKPO DID NOT HAVE THE POWER TO NEGOTIATE SUCH AN ARRANGEMENT. COMBAL WAS NOT SURPRISED BY THIS IN LIGHT OF THE FRENCH CONCLUSION THAT NIGERIA HAS AN ESSENTIALLY COLLEGIAL MANNER OF MAKING DECISIONS. LAMENTING THE DIFFICULTY OF DOING BUSINESS WITH NIGERIA, COMBAL SAID THE KEY TO SUCCESS IS FINDING THE RIGHT CHANNEL THROUGH WHICH TO INTRODUCE A PROPOSAL INTO THE COMPLEX DECISION-MAKING PROCESS.

3. TO SAUVAGNARGUES' WARNING ABOUT THE DANGERS OF HIGH OIL PRICES FOR THE WORLD ECONOMY, ARIKPO MADE NO COMMENT, ACCORDING TO COMBAL. ARIKPO'S ONLY REACTION TO THE FOREIGN MINISTER'S PRESENTATION OF THE FRENCH PROPOSAL FOR A TRI-PARTITE ENERGY CONFERENCE WAS TO SUGGEST THAT OTHER PRODUCTS, INCLUDING AGRICULTURAL, MIGHT USEFULLY BE DISCUSSED. FINALLY, ARIKPO DID NOT MENTION THE VETO OF THE SOUTH AFRICAN EXPULSION RESOLUTION AT THE UN, COMBAL SAID, BUT WHEN SAUVAGNARGUES DECIDED TO EXPLAIN THE FRENCH POSITION ANYWAY, ARIKPO REPLIED THAT WHILE HE DID NOT AGREE WITH IT, HE THOUGHT THE VETO PLACED THE FRENCH IN EXCELLENT POSTURE TO INTERVENE EFFECTIVELY WITH PRETORIA.

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